

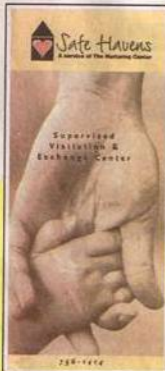
Spotlight

on Area Businesses...



Safe Havens, Another Community-Based Facet Of The Nurturing Center

By SCOTT SORENSON
Inter Lake Advertising Writer



The Nurturing Center — a nonprofit, community-based organization — focuses on strengthening families. Its mission is to provide service with respect in recognizing each family's own unique culture.

Headed by Executive Director Susan Christofferson and governed by its board of directors, The Nurturing Center is specifically designed to meet the challenges of parenting and family life through a variety of programs that include classes, support groups, in-home services, resource library, mentoring and child-care referrals.

"We are in business to serve families," said Christofferson. "For 27 years our programs have been evolving to better understand what today's families' needs truly are. On October 1 of last year, The Nurturing Center was awarded a federal grant through the Office of Violence Against Women, and opened

the Safe Havens visitation center soon after." Safe Havens facilitates visits for parents who are required by court order to have supervised visitations with their children. Safe Havens is a secure facility where parents can visit their children. Oftentimes during a separation or divorce, children are subjected to anger, resentment and hostility between parents. Safe Havens is there to monitor any type of adverse behavior that could negatively affect the child.

"It is essentially an opportunity for parents and children to engage without the conflict," Christofferson said. "We think children can benefit from having contact with an absent parent as long as that interaction is in a safe, controlled environment."

And to ensure safety, Safe Havens has a state-of-the-art security system complete with cameras and monitors. One touch of a button can summon the police, who will be there in an instant should there be a conflict.

"The Nurturing Center wishes to thank the Flathead Valley Electric Co-op Roundup For Safety board for its generosity in funding Safe Havens' sophisticated security system," Christofferson said. Safe Havens is not intrusive; parents are encouraged to bond with their children through quality time spent together and activities. The house features an infant/toddler play area, along with a preschool area that is set up to promote interaction. There are games for the older children, along with a kitchen area for crafts. Parents are encouraged to have meals with their children and during the spring and

summer, a variety of activities will be held outside within the fenced yard.

At Safe Havens, there are guidelines for visitations such as children can receive only written materials from parents that have been reviewed by the Safe Havens staff. Whispering is discouraged, because one parent might ask the child very personal questions about the other parent, and this in itself could be damaging.

Not all parents need a court order to qualify for service. Safe Havens is open to families who just need help, and the cost is based on a sliding scale specific to what families can afford.

In addition, Safe Havens provides a Safe Exchange program for separated or divorced parents to be able to exchange their children without having to be in contact with each other. A pre-arranged agreement allows parents to simply drop off their children at Safe Havens to be picked up by the other parent. This ensures a safe, hassle-free transition and it works on a sliding scale fee as well.

Safe Havens is available seven days a week from morning through late evening. A visitation monitor is always present to oversee the visitation, one family at a time.

The Nurturing Center is located at 146 Third Ave. W. in Kalispell, and currently operates out of four buildings in the community. The Board of Directors is considering a need for The Nurturing Center to consolidate all of its programs into one facility. Call The Nurturing Center at 756-1414. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Visit the Web site at: www.nurturingcenter.org.



Executive Director
Susan Christofferson.



Safe Havens is a secure facility where parents can visit their children with supervision.



Visitation Monitor Clariese Lyons observing family interaction.

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